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DEPARTMENT FOR AF DAS YAMAMOTO AND AF/E

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [ET](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN PM ADDRESSES PARLIAMENT ON UNREST,
REFORMS AND BORDER ISSUE

¶1. SUMMARY. In a December 13 address to Parliament, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi focused on the impending prosecution of CUD opposition party members, a newly established commission set to probe the June and December violence, and Ethiopia's commitment to withdraw troops near the border with Eritrea to December 2004 positions. Acknowledging that the government was preoccupied with bringing "CUD violent hardliners" to justice and investigating its own actions in June and December, the Prime Minister admitted little progress had been made recently on electoral, civil service, justice and budget reforms. He also reaffirmed the GOE's commitment to withdraw troops from the Eritrean border as per United Nations Security Resolution ¶1640.

¶2. The entire text of PM Meles' address is included below. This is an unofficial translation posted by state-run media outlets. Section titles have been added for readability.

¶3. BEGIN TEXT:

Please allow me to present briefly a report pertaining to the activities of the executive body after the approval of the cabinet by the Honored House.

The executive body has been busy with the implementation of the objectives of peace, democracy and development, which were forwarded by the ruling party in the election process.

PROSECUTION OF CUD "HARDLINERS"

To realize the building of a democratic system various activities have been undertaken in the last two months. In this regard, the incident of street violence that was instigated by the CUD hardliner leadership and later on attempted to be prolonged by OLF attracted our attention to a great extent to control and ensure peace, stability and the rule of law. As the Police Commissioner had already reported the details of the violence I do not go back to that issue. However, I would like to focus on some points that are not touched on by the report of the Commissioner as follows.

Despite the tireless efforts of the government to settle the disputes that came out in connection with the elections and following the situation of violence and bloodshed, as a result of the refusal of the CUD violent hardliners to dialogue, appropriate measures have been taken to put the violent hardliners under control and bring them to justice in accordance with the law. Police have put under custody those

suspects who have attempted to demolish the constitutional order and brought their cases to the prosecutor straight away after investigation. The prosecutor is also ready to sue the suspects based on the police investigation in few days time soon. Thus, grounds have been laid to conduct the trial of violent CUD hardliner leaders in regular court in public in line with the constitution with due respect to their constitutional rights. As the case is mainly to be handled in court now onwards, the executive body is to wait for the judgment of the court and is ready to execute it, under restricted mission to ensure respect of the law. Those youth who had participated in thousands in the CUD violent hardliner orchestrated street riot were temporarily put under control and most of them have been released after investigation and yet about three thousand of them are to face justice for the various crimes they committed. The case of these youngsters is also to be left mainly to the judiciary. Hence the executive body is expecting the judgment of the courts and is ready to execute the decision.

After the swift collapse of the street violence that was instigated by CUD, principally through the efforts of the peace loving and law observing public and the sacrifices paid and efforts exerted by the security forces, OLF has tried to create similar unrest in Oromia Region in coordination with Shaebia. This attempt has been put under control in all rural and most urban areas in Oromia without causing any difficulty, even though school interruptions have occurred in some West Shoa and West Wellega zone towns. Moreover, in some towns like Ambo and Jeldu, conflict sparking attempts were made. As the problem was bound in few towns and not demanded extra force other than the local administration could exert the federal government did not intervene.

The regional government by coordinating law enforcing bodies and the public has taken necessary actions and is undertaking activities to bring to justice those individuals and groups who have played leading role in the unrest.

Hence, it has been possible to crash (sic) the coordinated attempts of the violence forces that targeted to disrupt the stability of our country. The government would also commit itself to make strict follow up to crash similar attempts at their infancy.

INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO JUNE, DECEMBER VIOLENCE

Ensuring the rule of law is a corner stone in building a democratic system. The government has the authority and the obligation of taking necessary actions to maintain the rule of law, peace and stability. It is believed that the government should discharge its responsibility adhering to the rule of law as well. Despite the fact that the government is duty bound to take necessary actions to ensure the reign of law and order, it must not use excess force. In case it is found using excess force it is accountable. In the bid to protect the law and halt the violence, different parties complained that the security forces have used excess power. In line with this the government has started the investigation process. The Honored House has also established by proclamation a free and neutral Inquiry Commission by virtue of its power to control the executive body. The government has also instructed all concerned bodies to cooperate with the Inquiry Commission based on the decision of the House of Peoples' Representatives. We are now ready to execute any decision that would come out of the Inquiry Commission's final investigation task. In general, the government has successfully accomplished the task of ensuring the rule of law by living up to the expectation of our struggle to build a democratic system in that it controlled in a very short time, as opposed to the wish or fear of certain groups, the violence that geared to turn over the government, made possible the investigation of the cases of those who are involved in violence and brought them to the court and facilitated the realization of the Inquiry Commission that would investigate complaints.

----- PARLIAMENTARY REFORM -----

In addition to the successfully undertaking activities of ensuring the rule of law in the last two months the executive body has also carried out several performances pertaining to a democratic system building. Endeavors are being exerted to look into the developments that have occurred after the election and examine the shortcomings and put in action plans that would correct inadequacies and prevent incidence of violence. It is to be recalled that one of the major criticisms that opposition parties and some sections put against our democratic process is the code of conduct and operational procedure of the House of Peoples' Representatives. It is also obvious that this code of conduct and operational procedure is criticized as if it is uncommon in other old democracies and that it would limit the role of opposition parties. Based on this it is to be recalled as well that the government promised to draw lessons from four countries that have rich experiences of parliamentary system namely: Canada, Germany, India and Britain.

Accordingly the Spokes Person of the House of Peoples Representatives has prepared a guideline that would enable to hire external professionals who would study our code of conduct and operational procedure vis--vis that of the experienced democracies and identify in our conduct and operational procedure those articles that are less democratic.

If the external experts prove with tangible evidence that our code of conduct and operational procedure is in one way or another that it is far away from the mentioned four countries system and meant to restrict the role of the opposition, the ruling party would be ready to correct those articles soon according to its prior pledge.

Based on the stated study if the ethics and working procedures of our country include no article except those found in one or the other of the four countries it will be

notified publicly. Accordingly if there are any problems raised by opposition parties after our ethics and working procedure has been proven to be similar with that of those countries who have advanced culture of democracy, the ruling party will be ready to solve them. As the main issue at present is ensuring whether our ethics and working procedure is similar or different from that of the countries with advanced democratic culture, the government's main concern will be to work together with concerned bodies to complete the stated study rapidly.

----- ELECTORAL REFORM -----

It is to be recalled that re-election was held after extensive work of investigation in areas where problems encountered during the third national election. The process of investigation and corrective measures proved that the office of the Electoral Board has a considerable problem of executive capacity. Thus relevant governmental bodies have taken various measures to resolve these problems.

It is also to be recalled that the House of Peoples Representatives decided to extend the mandate of the Board up to Sene 1998 E.C. (June 2006) and it was given the mission to present complete election report to the House as well as to build its executive capacity. Based on this, the Board has made foreign consultancy body, which has been closely following up the election and providing professional support present brief evaluation report.

The Board has taken practical measures to employ foreign consultants who would address the problems identified in the evaluation report and a guideline has been prepared. The

government will work with concerned bodies to successfully implement the capacity building work of the Board by taking lessons from countries with advanced democratic culture.

MEDIA FREEDOMS

Mass media plays an irreplaceable role in building a democratic system. The state media played a very constructive role during the election campaign and it was appreciated internationally. However opposition parties have been raising complaints regarding media utilization after the election. It is essential to investigate these complaints and give lasting solution if there are problems.

On the other hand the private media has been proven to be the main weapons of violence and upheaval. It also included journalists engaged in illegal activities.

It was found to be essential to create a condition in which the media will free itself from illegal activity and contribute its share in the democratization process. In this respect issuing a legal framework and creating a strong accountability system is believed to be something that should be given a special attention.

Although there was a draft press law, which prepared with the participation of all stakeholders, based on our recent experiences and by taking lessons from countries with advanced democratic culture, enrichment of the draft press law is underway with foreign professionals. In order to be able to enrich the draft law by adopting legal frameworks and systems of accountability from countries that are advanced in their democratic culture, practical measure is being taken by the Speaker of the House. The government will do its level best together with other stakeholders to enable private and state media to contribute their share in the democratization process by respecting law and order and by being responsible and accountable.

CUD MPs SHOULD FORM NEW PARTY

On this occasion, I would like to ascertain that the ruling party is ready to engage in dialogue with opposition parties that respect law and order. As the violent leaders of CUD perpetrated their illegal action in the name of their party CUD is accused as a party.

If there is any decision to be made by the court in this respect the Administration will implement it rapidly. This being the case it is to be recalled that the government has noted that those who have not been detained have three options. Should they condemn the illegal activities and objectives of CUD and respect the constitution and other laws of the land and opt to engage in politics either by establishing themselves as a new political organization individually, the government will ensure their right. It was also made clear that if they pursue, in one way or another, the violent option of CUD, the government will take legal measures against them, and if there are members who take themselves out of politics their right will be respected.

Accordingly, some of the party leaders and members on whom decision had not been passed to detain are now being put under control as they are found involving in illegal activities while others are given last warning to refrain themselves from doing such acts.

Other members of the CUD have desire to work independently and based on the law. Out of the 109 CUD representatives elected for the House of Peoples Representatives MPs not less than 66 have joined the parliament, which the government considers it as a commendable measure as this is the manifestation of pursuing their cause legally and peacefully. If these people decide to pursue their politics independently

or by establishing themselves a new party their move will be legal and acceptable unless it promotes violence.

EPRDF TO ADMINISTER ADDIS ABABA PROVISIONALLY IN ABSENCE OF CUD

The other issue to be raised in connection with this is the issue of the Addis Ababa Administration. The government believes that like in other parts of the country, residents of Addis Ababa should be governed by a party they elected.

It is to be recalled that the necessary preparations had been made to hand over the administrative power of Addis Ababa council to the CUD who won majority seats. However CUD failed to take responsibility of the administration due to its violent mission, and in order to fill the power gap in Addis Ababa the House decided for the provisional administration to remain in power and ordered for a lasting solution to be sought and to be presented immediately.

Based on the order and decision of the House, directives have been issued for the provisional administration to continue in power for three months and set provisional plans. However the government has refrained from giving final decision in order to close the chance of the residents to be administered by the party they elected.

However if the situation continues like this it will contradict the order the House passed for lasting solution to be sought on one hand, and on the other hand it will hurt the socio economic development of the city. Therefore, I would like to make sure that I would present after discussing with concerned bodies an option that is believed to address the problem sustainably in one-month period.

CIVIL SERVICE AND JUSTICE REFORM DELAYED

It's clear that strong democratic system can exist when democratic and good governance institutions are built. Cognizant of this, the government has been vigorously engaged in building democratic institutions. In this regard the civil service reform and the justice system have been given special attention however, due to election related problems it received less attention in the last two months.

Because of this, a situation arose in which the programs weakened and sometimes a tendency came about in which the results that have been achieved became reversed. In recognition of this fact, the government has carried out tasks in the last two months to re-start and continue, aggressively, the reform programs. The result of this endeavor would be presented to the parliament regularly by the concerned bodies.

ETHIOPIA-ERITREA CONFLICT

Side by side with the government's relentless effort to realize our democratic goals, various efforts have been made to achieve our peace objectives in the last two months. Accordingly, an issue of special attention has been preventing armed hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea and achieving sustainable and peaceful solution to the problem. Since the moment is one in which the Eritrean government has taken measures aggravating the tense situation in the border areas and is beating the war drum, it has become appropriate and essential that the issue gets a serious attention more than any time before.

If the Eritrean government believes that it would achieve victory from the war, there is no doubt that it would start one.

Therefore, the only way to avoid the possibility of war is to build up a balance of power to show that the Eritrean government would not achieve any victorious outcome if it starts a war. Accordingly, the government has carried out satisfactory tasks in the last few years to bring about such a balance of power. Such a task will continue until sustainable peace is achieved. When the Eritrean government took measures aggravating the tense situation in the border areas, the government has strengthened our defense forces in the area in the last two months so that, on the one hand, to avoid armed hostilities emerging out of wrong assumptions and on the other hand, to be able to take speedy and decisive action in the event of armed hostilities breaking out.

Hand in hand with this measure to address the danger of war, the government would exert its utmost effort to bring lasting and peaceful resolution to the problem. Thus, many attempts have been made to realize the five-point peace proposal we made last year to find a negotiated settlement.

The UN Security Council is closely following the issue and after many deliberations in the last few weeks have made many decisions. One of the decisions is the return of the deployed Ethiopian defense force to its last year's position. Although, the decisions made by the UN are not without their own limitations, since the Ethiopian government is firmly committed to implementing decisions passed by a body with a huge duty as the UN Security Council, and returning our defense forces to last year's position as well as keeping away our extra forces from the border would not harm our strength, we are implementing the decision by the Security Council.

On the other hand, we have made an appropriate and positive response, as we used to do, to the call for the implementation of the decision by the boundary commission. As we all know, although Ethiopia believes that the decision of the boundary commission is wrong, she has accepted the decision in principle. On top of that, to be able to implement the decision so that it could ensure sustainable peace, Ethiopia has indicated its readiness to address the issue through discussion and negotiation. The government would continue with this correct peaceful stand energetically.

BUDGET AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION WEAKENED

We know that our government's major focus and undertakings is on development. Various tasks have been carried out in the last two months to implement the budget and development programs approved last year. Because of the tense situation created in relation to issues of the election in Addis Ababa and a few other towns, on top of causing harm to the development endeavor in these towns, by diverting the attention of the government, and particularly that of civil servants, the development programs suffered a weakening in implementation, to some extent. In recognition of this situation, the government has taken measures to ensure that all development forces made the appropriate effort towards development. Encouraging results are recorded in this regard and we believe that the details of the implementation of our development tasks will be reported by the relevant bodies in the future.

Together with the relentless effort to implement the targets of the year, a huge effort has been made to complete the

preparation of the coming five years' development targets. Currently, since the preparation has been completed it is expected that it would be presented for discussion by the cabinet of ministers. After that it would be presented to the Parliament for exhaustive discussion. The five-year target, which would be approved in this way, would serve as our strategic plan for all of our development tasks.

Thank you.

END TEXT.
HUDDLESTON